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**Seeing With Three Eyes**

**Ibn al-ʿArabī's *barzakh* and the Contemporary World Situation**

**Abstract**

*The author of this paper attempts to write about the mystery of the barzakh in and from Ibn al-ʿArabī's perspective. Ibn al-ʿArabī's perspective observes things from three dimensions: the two dimensions of the positive and negative, which are familiar to us by means of our ordinary binary perception, and in addition the third dimension that belongs neither to the one, nor to the other. This is the dimension of the barzakh, which can be called tertiary, since it is unitive and inclusive of the two familiar dimensions. "Seeing" the third dimension of the barzakh is not accessible to ordinary binary perception; it is accessible, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, only to those who possess a special kind of seeing; they are the ahl al-kashf, those who "see" with three eyes, as it were. Nevertheless, between the binary and the tertiary/unitive perceptions there is a pervasive tension of relatedness. It is a dynamic tension that makes its mark on all levels of existence, whether consciously or unconsciously. In other words, although the barzakh belongs to the dimension of the mysterious "third", it is powerfully present and influential all around. It manifests itself as the cognitive function that Ibn al-ʿArabī calls 'imagination' (al-khayāl). For him, the barzakh-imagination is the most powerful cognitive function in the human makeup, and it hinges on a paradox: it makes everything that it conceives an "it/not it". God, too, from this perspective, is "He/not He". Following from the cognitive field that evolves from the tertiary-barzakh-imaginative perspective, I consider the notion coincidentia oppositorum ('the union of the opposites', al-jamʿ bayna al-ḡiddayn). Finally, I apply the insights stemming from Ibn al-ʿArabī's perspective to the question of 'identities' and to the ethical dilemmas of our contemporary world.*

**Keywords**

apophasis, *barzakh*, binary perception, *coincidentia oppositorum*, Ibn al-ʿArabī, imagination, paradox, tertiary perception

Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī Ibn al-ʿArabī,<sup>1</sup> known also as *al-Shaykh al-akbar* (the Great Master), was born in Murcia in 1165 to a respectable Andalusian family. In his twenties, probably in Seville, he was formally initiated into the Sufi Path, and, during many years and in several localities, studied with several Sufi teachers, among them women. However, he claimed to be, and has thus been considered, an *Uwaisī*, that is to say, a mystic, whose inspiration and training in the deepest sense have come not from an earthly master, but from *al-Khaḍīr* (= *al-Khiḍr*), the undying teacher of those who do not have a flesh-and-blood one.<sup>2</sup> In 1200, already widely known as a stimulating

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In this paper referred to as Ibn al-ʿArabī or IA.

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For more on the mysterious figure of *Khiḍr* see below, footnote 10.

spiritual authority with several literary works to his name, he left al-Andalus and the West for the Islamic East. After much traveling, he settled in Damascus, where he died in 1240. During his wandering years, he started working on his huge opus, *The Meccan Revelations* (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*). This, as well as the *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*) – the work on the cosmic panorama of prophets and prophecy – were completed in Damascus during the last years of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s life.<sup>3</sup>

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At the threshold of writing this paper, I stand perplexed; who would not, in view of the formidable corpus of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works,<sup>4</sup> and the daunting volume of the scholarly discussions on him.<sup>5</sup> But the bulk of these literary corpora is the least of my concerns; it is IA’s visionary perspective in front of which I stand perplexed. IA is a master of creating unique, grand patterns – conceptual as well as linguistic – by interlacing diverse themes and syntactical patterns together. Unravelling his complex and interconnected lacework and sorting out neatly its fine threads, often results in an obfuscated view, unwieldy style and watered-down account. Still, the work of scholars is precisely this: to sort, classify, paraphrase, compare, analyze, and reduce. Moreover, whereas IA’s writing stems from an inclusive, visionary perspective that transcends conventional forms and structures, his interpreter, by definition, must limit her reproductions to the level of the familiar and comprehensible. This is bound to be frustrating, especially when the binary cognition of the interpreter is the tool by which she faces IA’s *barzakh*, what I have termed his *tertiary-imaginative vision*. Is scholarly hermeneutics suitable at all to review a visionary writing such as IA’s? Can we see what he sees in the unitive perspective from which he sees it?<sup>6</sup>

IA often warns his readers that to understand what he is writing, one should be either a ‘mystic’, that is, one who possesses visionary seeing (*min ahl al-kashf*), or a pure and simple believer (*min al-mu’minīn*). Those who belong to either of these two groups may follow his view without speculative argumentations or sophisticated interpretations.<sup>7</sup> But for most, the experience of reading him will result in the perplexity (*ḥayra*) about which I am complaining.<sup>8</sup> Out of frustration and perplexity the interpreter may relegate IA’s writing to the category of apophysis, the language of unsaying, of paradox, of negative theology. But would such a classification help make the objects of IA’s vision satisfyingly meaningful?

For all these inhibitions, I ask myself why not give up, from the outset, writing on IA, either in general or on any specific theme. Well, there is an answer and it is simple: his writing is magnetically captivating and his visionary perspective alluring; not unlike a detective’s obsession with deciphering the mystery behind a complex crime. His daring syntactical structures and the intricacy and mistiness of his writing seem to suggest that behind them hides a field of truths (*ḥaqā’iq*) and meanings (*ma’ānī*) worth unravelling; if only one could see it with IA’s eyes.

One mystery in particular has lured me to search for a meaning. It concerns IA’s mysterious *barzakh*, the middle, the ‘third’ principle which challenges and even overrides the binary structure of our cognitive faculties. Through their in-built predilection to hover between the ‘yes’ and the ‘no’, between viewing something as ‘positive’ and its opposite as ‘negative’, between an ‘I’ and an ‘other’, our conceptions and ideologies, even the most precious among

them, are built on dichotomies. IA's *barzakh* is that fine line, which belongs neither to the side of the 'yes' nor to the side of the 'no'. How are we to conceive it? And, since our minds are bound by spatial configurations – *where* is this line to be found? Sensing that at the heart of the *barzakh* nests the key to IA's all-embracing outlook, I have been driven, despite my inhibitions, to ponder this enigma from Ibn al-'Arabī's perspective; to enter his mind, as it were.

In my attempt at making some sense of these questions, I have found it helpful to juxtapose various passages from IA's writing and use them as road signs. I shall start by introducing the *barzakh* in IA's own words. In chapter 72 of *The Meccan Revelations* (= *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*), he writes:

"The 'middle', that which separates between two sides and makes them distinguished from one another, is more hidden than they are (*akḥfā minhumā*). For example, the line that separates between the shadow and the sun; or the barrier (*barzakh*) between the two seas – the sweet one and the bitter one; or that which separates between black and white. We know that there is a separating line there, but the eye does not perceive it; the intellect acknowledges it, though it does not conceive of what it is, namely, it does not conceive its 'whatness' (quiddity)."<sup>3</sup>

By "the two seas" IA alludes to "the sweet one and the bitter one" of the Qur'ānic verse 25:53. The verse runs as follows:

"And it is He who has released the two seas, one fresh and sweet and one salty and bitter, and He placed between them a barrier (*wa-jā'ala baynahumā barzakhān*) and a prohibiting partition."<sup>4</sup>

These two seas, undeniably, are contrary to one another, entirely different from one another, characterized by opposite attributes, yet contiguous, sharing an imaginary line, which keeps them apart and prevents their waters from mixing. The features of "sweet water" versus "bitter water" are thus kept intact thanks to a *barzakh*, which IA describes as "more hidden than they are". What is, and where is, this "hidden" line that carries out concurrently two

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For a comprehensive and scholarly biography of IA, see Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. by Peter Kingsley, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993. See, also, Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn 'Arabī*, Oxford, Ashland: Anqa Publishing, White Cloud Press, 1999.

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See Jane Clark, Stephen Hirtenstein, "Establishing Ibn 'Arabī's Heritage: First Findings from the MIAS Archiving Project", *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, No. 52, 2012, pp. 1–32, <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articlespdf/clark-hirtenstein-jmias-v52.pdf>.

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See, e.g., the list of articles on the webpage of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articlelist.html>. Indispensable for any study concerning IA are also the two volumes by William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) and *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-*

*'Arabī's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

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For a fine scholarly elaboration of the *barzakh*, see Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn al-'Arabī's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.

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See, e.g., IA's "Introduction" in the first volume of his *Meccan Revelations*; Ibn al-'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1994, Vol. 1, Supplement (*tatimma*), p. 169.

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On the people of reason (*ahl al-ra'y*) and their perplexity (*ḥayra*) versus the people of mystical seeing (*ahl al-kashf*), see, e.g., *ibid.*, Vol. 1, Ch. 50: "Concerning Men of Perplexity and Incapacity (*ajz*)", pp. 611–615.

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See *ibid.*, Vol. 2, Ch. 72, p. 536; for an almost exact parallel, see *ibid.*, Vol. 1, Ch. 63, pp. 680–681.

contradictory functions – separating between two opposites yet holding them together?

The “two seas” of the Q. 25:53 are obviously associated with the “the two seas” of the Q. 18:60. The group of verses 60–82 of Sura 18, the Sura of the Cave (*sūrat al-kaḥf*), presents one of the most enigmatic passages in the Qur’ān. The protagonist of this Qur’ānic passage is Moses. He and his servant are supposed to meet an enigmatic person, whom God names “one of Our servants” (*‘abdan min ‘ibādīnā*) and to whom God has given special knowledge (*‘allamnāhu min ladunnā ‘ilmān* [18:65]). The meeting place is identified only as being “the confluence of the two seas” (*majma‘ al-baḥrayn*). Apparently – the Qur’ānic verses are not explicit about this – Moses sets out to seek the enigmatic servant of God<sup>10</sup> at this wondrous place in order to learn from him the divine knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ladunnī*) bestowed on him. This is why Moses is resolved to search for this person until he reaches “where the two seas meet (*majma‘ al-baḥrayn*)”, though, he vows, “I may march on for ages”. Moses thus sets out to face three mysteries: a place, a person and knowledge; and all these as a preamble to the later stage of his search, in which he will have to face odd, seemingly unreasonable and unjust deeds performed by this servant of God (see verses 66–82). Indeed Sura 18 is replete with wonders and enigmas,<sup>11</sup> and thus concurs with IA’s pursuit of the extraordinary and mysterious *barzakh*.

The enigmatic *barzakh* of the Qur’ānic verses is, from IA’s perspective, a paradox, a contradiction in terms: “that which separates between two sides and makes them distinguished from one another” and yet, “is more hidden than they are”. “More hidden”, that is to say, belongs to an imperceptible dimension, the dimension of the unseen, or that which can be revealed only by means of the ‘imagination’ (*al-khayāl*). Here, in paradoxical terms, is how IA describes the *barzakh* in chapter 63 of *The Meccan Revelations*:

“Since the *barzakh* is something that separates what is knowable and what is unknowable (*ma‘lūm wa-ghayr ma‘lūm*); non-existent (*ma‘dūm*) and existent (*mawjūd*); intelligible and unintelligible (*ma‘qūl wa-ghayr ma‘qūl*); negated (*manfiyy*) and affirmed (*muthbat*) – it has been given the term *barzakh*. In itself it is intelligible (*ma‘qūl*), though there is nothing there but imagination (*khayāl*) [...]. For imagination is neither existent nor non-existent; neither known nor unknown; neither negated nor affirmed.”<sup>12</sup>

By endorsing the linguistic, or ‘nominal’, validity of the *barzakh* (“it has been given the term *barzakh*”, *summiya barzakhān iṣṭilāḥān*), IA asserts that it has an ontic existence of sorts,<sup>13</sup> while immediately negating it:

“When you grasp it, being intelligent, you will know that you have grasped an existent thing (*adrakta shay‘an wujūdiyyan*) on which your gaze has fallen, while you [also] know categorically, with proof (*qaṭ‘an bi-dalīl*), that there is nothing there to begin with and in principle (*ra‘san wa-aṣlan*); what is this thing for which you have affirmed an ontic existence (*shay‘iyya wujūdiyya*) and at the moment of your affirmation you have denied it?”<sup>14</sup>

With such contradictory attributes of the *barzakh* and the perception of it, IA takes us to the field of paradox and apophasis, to the “mystical languages of unsaying”, to borrow the phrasing of Michael Sells’ brilliant title.<sup>15</sup> But beyond this comparative classification, may we not consider the meaning of the epistemological and existential challenges with which IA presents us in these passages? May we not ask how to ‘see’ the *barzakh*, while with our binary perception we can only perceive the contrasting features of objects such as “the two seas”? And consequently, how to *know* what is between, or beyond, the two seas? Is there anything beyond our binary perception and, if so, what is it? And another question lurks in the vision of the *barzakh* confluence of the two seas: from this ‘third-dimensional’ perspective, do the separate

identities of the “two seas” merge and annihilate in the *barzakh*, and hence lose their identifying individual features of “sweetness” and “bitterness”; or are their ontological identities kept intact notwithstanding such conflation? IA, it seems to me, encourages us to ponder these questions, since, by saying “When you grasp it, being intelligent, you will know...” (ch. 63), as well as “the intellect acknowledges it, though it does not conceive of what it is, namely, it does not conceive of its ‘whatness’” (ch. 72), he suggests that the ‘intellect’ can grasp something of this tertian universe, at least the enigma behind our existential-epistemological grasp of reality.

In my attempt to grasp the elusive *barzakh* that emerges from the Qur’ānic passages above, I muse over another facet of its polar nature and ask: Being a *majmaʿ*, is the *barzakh* a ‘coincidence of opposites’? Can we qualify it with this concept borrowed from the field of the study of religions?<sup>16</sup> On the linguistic level, *al-jamʿ bayna al-diddayn* is precisely identical to the Latin term *coincidentia oppositorum*. Looked at from the Arabic terminology, *majmaʿ* (as in *majmaʿ al-bahrayn*) shares the root *j-m-ʿ* with *jamʿ*. Lexically, *majmaʿ* denotes a *place* of coming together and *jamʿ* the *act* of gathering and holding diverse things together, as well as the *state* that results from such an act – collectedness, aggregation, unity. In IA’s writing, *jamʿ* and its antonym *farq* (separation, differentiation) are cardinal concepts upon which his understanding of the God-Creation relationship is built. Their juxtaposition indicates indeed a coincidence of opposites.<sup>17</sup> Notably, IA often quotes a saying which he ascribes to the ninth-century Sufi Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz. When Abū Saʿīd was asked “By what means have you known God?”, he answered:

“God is only known by bringing together the opposites (*bi-jamʿihi bayna al-diddayn*).”

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Islamic tradition identifies this person with Khaḍir/Khiḍr; in the Sufi tradition, Khaḍir is the divine teacher of those who do not have a flesh-and-blood one. For a discussion on this Qur’ānic story, see Sara Sviri, *The Taste of Hidden Things: Images on the Sufi Path*, Inverness: The Golden Sufi Center, 1997, Ch. 4: “Where the Two Seas Meet: The Story of Khaḍir”, pp. 77–101; see also above, footnote 2.

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Note that the root ‘-j-b, denoting wonder, appears twice in this Sura – see verses 9 and 63; see also above, footnote 2.

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Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. 1, Ch. 63, pp. 680–681.

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The link between ‘words’ and ‘beings’ is one of the core themes in IA’s worldview, but it calls for a separate discussion.

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See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. 1, Ch. 63, pp. 680–681.

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See Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. See, also, Michael A. Sells, “Ibn ʿArabī’s Polished Mirror: Perspective

Shift and Meaning Event”, *Studia Islamica*, No. 67, 1988, pp. 121–149, doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595976>, esp. p. 129: “the *aporia* of trying to use language based upon delimitation to refer to the unlimited”.

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See, e.g., John Valk, “The Concept of the Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Thought of Mircea Eliade”, *Religious Studies*, Vol. 28 (1992), No. 1, pp. 31–41, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0034412500021351>.

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See, e.g., the poetic verse in Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. 6, Ch. 364, p. 47: *fa-ʿayn al-jamʿ ʿayn al-farq fa-ʿnẓur / bi-ʿaynika li-ʿjtimāʿ fi-l-iftirāq*: “the essence of *jamʿ* is the essence of *farq* look / in your essence (also: with your eye) for togetherness (*ijtimāʿ*) in separation (*iftirāq*)”. For *jamʿ* and *farq* (also *tafriqa*) in Sufi technical terminology, see, e.g., [Abū al-Ḥasan Hujwīrī, ‘Alī ibn ʿUthmān] *The Kashf Al-Mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism by Ali B. Uthmān Al-Jullābi Al-Hujwīrī*, trans. by Reynold A. Nicholson, London: Luzac, 1976, pp. 251–260 et passim. On the topic of ‘coincidence of opposites’, see Sara Sviri, “Between Fear and Hope: On the Coincidence of Opposites in Islamic Mysticism”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, No. 9, 1987, p. 316–349.

Then he recited:

“He is the First and the Last, the Apparent and the Hidden, (*huwa al-awwal wa-l-ākhir wa-l-ẓāhir wa-l-bāṭin*) and He has knowledge of all things (Q. 57:3).”<sup>18</sup>

So how does IA perceive the ‘coincidence’? How does he perceive the nature of reality in the realm of the *barzakh*? What happens to the differentiated identities which are held there together? Or does he leave it out of his existential map as a transcendent territory to which no man has access? In pursuing these questions, I find help in another passage from *The Meccan Revelations*.

Chapter 24 of *The Meccan Revelations* is not a long chapter, but it has a lengthy title. Here is the rendering of its first part: “The Twenty-Fourth Chapter Concerning the Knowledge that derives from the Ontological Sciences (... *jā’at ‘an al-‘ulūm al-kawniyya*) and the Wonders that it Contains”.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the chapter deals with various ‘ontological’ themes that can be cumulatively described as concerning the relationship of God – qua King and Owner (*mālik*) – with man and the world – qua kingdom and property (*mulk*) subsumed under God’s kingship and ownership. But the picture that IA paints in this chapter is not of a hierarchical relationship; what interests him specifically is the fate of the ‘property’, the ‘owned’, the ‘created’ within this interwoven existence. Or, to put it differently: how can the ‘property’ hold on to its differentiated, individual identity and attributes within such a close-knit relationship with its ‘owner’? Here, towards the last third of the chapter, IA introduces another concept worth contemplating: God’s ‘expansiveness’ (*al-tawassu’ al-ilāhī*). He writes:

“God’s expansiveness (*al-ittisā’ al-ilāhī*) entails that ‘God is He who gave everything its creation’ (Q. 20:50) and distinguished each and every thing in this world by this [creative] decree. He is he who distinguished it from any other; this is the [individual] unity of each and every thing; hence, *no two things are merged in one mixture (fa-mā ijtama’a ithnāni fī mizāj wāhid)*. [...] There is nothing but the [individual] unity of each and every thing; never do two things merge where differentiation has occurred [...]. From this point you will know [how] the large can mount the small and the broad the narrow without the broad becoming narrow or the narrow broad; in other words: nothing in their [contrasting] states changes [...].<sup>20</sup> Concerning this, Abū Sa’īd al-Kharrāz said: ‘God is only known by bringing opposites together.’ Then he recited: ‘He is the First and the Last, the Apparent and the Hidden’ (Q. 57:3). He meant from one face (*min wajh wāhid*), not from diverse references (*min nisab mukhtalifa*).”<sup>21</sup>

In this extraordinary passage IA asserts the singular individuality and particularity of every existing thing. Every created thing is unique. God does not clone. Hence, nothing really merges with anything to the point of losing one’s pre-ordained individual and distinct identity. Unlike some theologians and philosophers, IA does not subscribe to the theory of generalized, abstract, isolated ‘ideas’ as the transcendent exempla of all that is. Everything that *is* has its own individual blueprint and its existence is concrete and tangible inasmuch as its fullness is hidden and unknown. Nothing is the same as anything else. And yet all are embraced by God, who thus becomes known, according to Al-Kharrāz’s saying and the supporting Qur’ānic proof, as a *coincidentia oppositorum*. This is the embrace of the ‘First-Last-Apparent-Hidden’ totality in an inclusive unity of polar opposites. This unity is “the one face” by which God is known, not unlike the proverbial elephant who, in order to be known qua ‘elephant’, must be known through all its parts and members.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, none of the individual attributes is obliterated in this ‘knowing’. Each and every thing has its place in the unity of opposites. Thus, the *coincidentia oppositorum* is not a fuzzy mixture of different aspects or attributes, but a unity in which diverse parts co-exist. Such unity in all its fullness, sug-

gests IA, is the paradigm for everything that is, and it allows for wonders and possibilities beyond the grasp of the binary thought.

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The ethical implications of this vision are far-reaching, especially at the global moment in which this essay is written. There is nothing more remote in this moment than the vision of a *coincidence of opposites* seen from the tertiary dimension of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *barzakh*. Ours is a world of binary thinking, dichotomies, polarization, opposing opinions and antagonistic value-systems: ‘right’ is contrary to ‘wrong’; ‘good’ contrary to ‘bad’; ‘just’ to ‘unjust’; ‘sacred’ to ‘profane’. Right, good, just and sacred are praiseworthy; wrong, bad, unjust and profane are blameworthy. In our world-existence, wherever we are, wars of identities and values are raging from unrelenting convictions all-round – right, left and center. Far be it for us is to know how to hold on to our singular, individual identities without devouring the individual identities of others; they seem, to us, set on cancelling us and each one out. Hence, to preserve our identity demands that we defend it against its enemies at all cost; ironically, to the point of sacrificing it. When we tenaciously cling on to what, in our fancy, makes up our ‘identity’, we are perceived as loyal; when, out of the fold, we pledge the viability and validity of other identities, we are perceived as traitors. We pay lip service to the politics of the ‘other’, but culturally, religiously, socially and politically, in the name of ‘identities’ and under the umbrella of values, ideologies and dogmas, a culture of blame, self-righteousness and victimhood thrives. It is never ‘I’ who is responsible for this or that, it is always ‘you’; and so on, and so forth.

The state of dynamic perplexity vis-à-vis the shifting faces of reality, and the practice of ‘seeing with three eyes’ derived from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s vision of the *barzakh*, suggest that the two-dimensional and binary limits of our cognition miss out on glimpsing a larger, more inclusive and unitive picture. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s perspective teaches that beyond the dichotomies at the root of our cultural, religious, moral and political viewpoints – and even beyond the benign slogans of peace and love – there stretches a larger and wider perspective; if you wish, you can call it ‘mystical’, of a land of marvels, where “the large can mount the small and the broad the narrow without the broad becoming narrow or the narrow broad”.<sup>23</sup> From this perspective, the singularity of

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See Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. 1, Ch. 24, p. 447. For further references and elaborations of this saying, see Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī*, trans. by Ralph Manheim, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 188; W. C. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 67 et passim; W. C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, pp. 173, 236–237.

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Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. 1, pp. 443–448.

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The expression *irād al-kabīr ‘alā al-ṣaghīr*, translated here as “[how] the large can mount the small...”, occurs also in Ch. 8 of *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, in the description of

one of the marvels witnessed in “the Land of Reality” (*ard al-ḥaqīqa*) by people of mystical seeing (*ahl al-kashf*); see *ibid.*, p. 339. “In this land”, IA writes, “there are orchards and gardens, animals and minerals whose measure only God knows. Everything there, is a living-speaking being” (*ibid.*, p. 338).

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See *ibid.*, pp. 446–447.

22

For the “Elephant in a Dark Room” fable, see, e.g., [Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī] *The Mathnawī of Jalālu’d-dīn Rūmī*, trans. by Reynold A. Nicholson, Leyden, London: Brill, Luzac, 1926, Book III, pp. 1259–1274.

23

See above, footnote 20.

all things becomes both an apparent and a marvelous phenomenon. This singularity is not lost within the mesh of variant and contrasting identities; it is never annihilated in what is named the ‘Oneness of Being’ (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), or the ‘Coincidence of Opposites’ (*al-jamʿ bayna al-ḍiddayn*). The water of the “bitter sea” remains bitter and that of the “sweet sea” sweet. In view of the divine ‘expansiveness’, nothing is lost, for it allows that in each and every thing there exists its singular and concrete existence while co-existing even alongside its opposite.

**Sara Sviri**

### **Videnje trima očima**

#### **Ibn al-ʿArabījev barzakh i suvremena svjetska situacija**

##### **Sažetak**

*Autorica ovog rada nastoji pisati o misteriji barzakh u perspektivi Ibn al-ʿArabīja i iz njegove perspektive. Ibn al-ʿArabījeva perspektiva motri stvari iz tri dimenzije: dvije dimenzije pozitivnog i negativnog, koje su nam bliske zbog naše svakidašnje binarne percepcije, i dodatne, treće dimenzije, koja ne pripada ni jednoj ni drugoj. To je dimenzija barzakh, koju možemo nazvati tercijskom jer ona ujedinjuje i uključuje ove dvije poznate dimenzije. »Videnje« treće dimenzije, barzakh, nije dostižno uobičajenoj binarnoj percepciji, nego je dostižno, sukladno Ibn al-ʿArabīju, samo onima koji posjeduju naročitu vrstu videnja; oni su ahl al-kashf, oni koji, takoreći, »vide« trima očima. Ipak, između binarnih i tercijskih/ujedinjujućih percepcija postoji sveprožimajuća veza napetosti. To je dinamična napetost koja obilježava sve stupnjeve postojanja, svjesno ili nesvjesno. Drugim riječima kazano: iako barzakh pripada dimenziji mističnog »trećeg«, snažno je prisutan i utjecajan posvuda. Manifestira se kao kognitivna funkcija koju Ibn al-ʿArabī naziva ‘imaginacijom’ (al-khayāl). Za njega je barzakh-imaginacija najznačajnija kognitivna funkcija u ljudskom ustrojstvu i ona ovisi o paradoksu: ona čini sve što koncipira »to/nije to«. Također, Bog, motren iz ove perspektive, jest »On/nije On«. Kako slijedi iz kognitivnog polja koje nastaje iz tercijske-barzakh-imaginativne perspektive, smatram da je taj pojam coincidentia oppositorum (‘jedinstvo suprotnosti’, al-jamʿ bayna al-ḍiddayn). Konačno, primjenjujem uvide koji proistječu iz Ibn al-ʿArabījeve perspektive na pitanje ‘identiteta’ i na etičke dileme našeg suvremenog svijeta.*

##### **Ključne riječi**

apofazija, *barzakh*, binarna percepcija, *coincidentia oppositorum*, Ibn al-ʿArabī, imaginacija, paradoks, tercijska percepcija

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### **Sehen mit drei Augen**

#### **Ibn al-ʿArabīs barzakh und die zeitgenössische Weltsituation**

##### **Zusammenfassung**

*Die Verfasserin dieses Beitrags macht den Versuch, über das Mysterium von barzakh in und aus Ibn al-ʿArabīs Perspektive zu schreiben. Ibn al-ʿArabīs Blickwinkel beobachtet die Dinge aus drei Dimensionen: zwei Dimensionen des Positiven und Negativen, die uns dank unserer alltäglichen binären Wahrnehmung vertraut sind, und darüber hinaus eine dritte Dimension, die weder der einen noch der anderen angehört. Dies ist die Dimension des barzakh, die man tertiär nennen kann, da sie vereinigend ist und die beiden bekannten Dimensionen einbezieht. Das „Sehen“ der dritten Dimension des barzakh ist nicht erreichbar für gewöhnliche binäre Wahrnehmung; es ist, Ibn al-ʿArabī zufolge, nur für jene realisierbar, die über eine besondere Art des Sehens verfügen; sie sind die ahl al-kashf, also diejenigen, die sozusagen mit drei Augen „sehen“. Nichtsdestoweniger existiert zwischen den binären und den tertiären/vereinigenden Wahrnehmungen eine durchdringende Spannung der Verwandtschaft. Es ist eine dynamische Spannung, die auf allen Ebenen der Existenz, ob bewusst oder unbewusst, ihre Spuren hin-*

terlässt. Mit anderen Worten, obzwar das barzakh zur Dimension des mysteriösen „Dritten“ gehört, ist es allenthalben stark präsent und einflussreich. Es manifestiert sich als kognitive Funktion, die Ibn al-‘Arabī „Imagination“ (al-khayāl) nennt. Für ihn ist die barzakh-Imagination die stärkste kognitive Funktion in der Struktur eines Menschen, wobei sie von einem Paradox abhängt: Alles, was sie konzipiert, macht sie zu einem „es/nicht es“. Aus dieser Perspektive ist Gott ebenfalls ein „Er/nicht Er“. Mit dem Ausgangspunkt im kognitiven Feld, das sich aus der tertiär-barzakh-imaginativen Perspektive herausbildet, nehme ich den Begriff *coincidentia oppositorum* („Zusammenfall der Gegensätze“, al-jam‘ bayna al-diddayn) in Augenschein. Schließlich verwende ich die Einsichten, die aus Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Perspektive hervorgehen, bei der Frage der „Identitäten“ sowie bei ethischen Dilemmas unserer zeitgenössischen Welt.

#### Schlüsselwörter

Apophasie, *barzakh*, binäre Wahrnehmung, *coincidentia oppositorum*, Ibn al-‘Arabī, Imagination, Paradox, tertiäre Wahrnehmung

Sara Sviri

### Voir avec trois yeux

#### Le barzakh d’Ibn al-‘Arabī et la situation mondiale contemporaine

#### Résumé

L’auteur de ce travail entreprend d’écrire sur le mystère du barzakh, dans et à partir de la perspective d’Ibn al-‘Arabī. La perspective d’Ibn al-‘Arabī observe les choses sur la base de trois dimensions : deux dimensions, celle du positif et celle du négatif, qui nous sont proches car notre perception quotidienne binaire repose sur elles, et une troisième dimension en plus, qui n’appartient ni à l’une ni à l’autre. C’est la dimension du barzakh, que l’on pourrait appeler de tertiaire car elle unit et inclut les deux dimensions qui nous sont bien connues. « Voir » la troisième dimension du barzakh n’est pas accessible à la perception binaire ordinaire; elle est accessible, selon Ibn al-‘Arabī, seulement à ceux qui possèdent une qualité particulière dans « le voir » : ce sont des ahl al-kashf, ceux qui, pour ainsi dire, « voient » avec trois yeux. Néanmoins, il existe entre les perceptions binaires et tertiaires/unissantes une intime et omniprésente connexion de l’ordre d’une tension dynamique qui révèle tous les niveaux de l’existence, conscients ou inconscients. En d’autres termes, bien que le barzakh appartienne à la dimension mystique du « troisième », il est fortement présent et exerce son influence en tout lieu. Il se manifeste comme une fonction cognitive que Ibn al-‘Arabī nomme « imagination » (al-khayāl). Pour lui, l’imagination-barzakh est la plus puissante des fonctions cognitives présentes dans la constitution de l’Homme et repose sur un paradoxe : elle forme tout ce qui conçoit le « cela/cela n’est pas ». De même, Dieu, pensé à partir de cette perspective est « Lui/n’est pas Lui ». Sur la base du champ cognitif qui est apparu à partir de l’idée de l’imaginative-barzakh-tertiaire, je pense qu’il est question du concept de *coincidentia oppositorum* (« l’unité des opposés », al-jam‘ bayna al-diddayn). Enfin, j’applique les idées qui découlent de la perspective d’Ibn al-‘Arabī à la question des « identités » et aux dilemmes éthiques de notre monde contemporain.

#### Mots-clés

apophasie, *barzakh*, perception binaire, *coincidentia oppositorum*, Ibn al-‘Arabī, imagination, paradoxe, perception tertiaire